

## A Walk Through the Marshes

(The late Dr. Alice Bigelow was one of the best writers who ever wrote for the *Clipper*. Here is a sample of her poetic prose.)

I began taking long walks around the town about 1890; first with my mother and her botany, then for many years alone or with a chosen friend.

My favorite trail was a section of the path taken by children from Powder Point to the Academy, next to the town hall. It left Blue Fish River to skirt the Walter Cushman property and then edged the salt marsh toward Wright's dike, which dams Hound's Ditch into a pond. Just this side of the dike, in the salt marsh, is a deep spring of cold drinking water, fresh at low tide.

but salt and useless at high. As children we carried on our belts tin halfpint cups called "pickers," for measuring blueberries. At the spring we rested, and got out the pickers for a long cold drink. We scrambled up the dike and looked eagerly for flowers, turtles, and snakes and were seldom disappointed. One year a pair of substantial water snakes sunned daily on the dike in its warm sand, and did not withdraw for passers-by. Someone must have tired of detouring and dispatched them. The broken shells of turtle eggs paved the path. At the far end of the dike is a sandy hill, where my brother joined other boys in digging out Indian relics. Flowers grew thickly around the pond; the turtlehead and arrow-leaf, both white, and the sweet bunches of groundnut blossom, in seductive shades of brown.

### Remember Mayor's Swamp?

The damming of Hound's Ditch makes a pond, which in turn backs into an area once well wooded, making a swamp which I knew as Frazer's Swamp, doubtless because it touches the Frazer property on Harrison St. Earlier it

was known as the Major's Swamp because the land of Major Alden bounded the other side.

The dike once crossed, we could plunge through the muddy course of the brook to its intersection with the railroad track; or the less hardy could circle the wet ground and come out on Harrison St. The academy children did the latter, taking the railroad track up to the level of their building and short-cutting across private land.

In the swamp my mother introduced me to some of our orchids; the Fringed White and the Ragged Green, and for years I kept a July date with them. Three more grew by the railroad track where the brook crossed it; in early June the arethusa, followed by the calopogon and the pogonia, delicate and sweet, carefully cut with a pocket knife. The orchids were not all. In early summer the white azalea bushes gleamed like torches through the thicket. Spearmint fringed the brook, and forgetmenots. Snakes liked the edge of the railroad area, as well as turtles. I once found a land tortoise snuggled confidently against the warm steel

rail, and moved him to a safer bed. There were blueberries through the swamp, which we could sell for 8 cents a quart. Beach plums came home for jelly, as well as the wild grapes that hung high in the trees.

### An Albino Robin

During my teens and twenties I kept the back of my diary a list of my findings in the swamp. Topping the bird list was an albino robin, listed for several consecutive years. I saw in the *Clipper* that some of his descendants are still in town.

Topping the flower list is a gorgeous blue surprise which met me on a sad September day when I took a farewell tour about the swamp. Out from under the rail fence which bounded the track was marching a gay little army of fringed gentians, the first I had ever seen. I never failed to keep

my appointment with them till the tall grass and bushes killed them out. The trees of the swamp are mostly cut away and it is largely dried up. The steel rails and short grass of the road enclosure are gone, grown up to heavy grass and bushes.

A few years ago, on a driving trip in the South, I called on Roland Thomas, son of a beloved minister of Pilgrim Church. He was the editor of a newspaper in Little Rock Arkansas, but he took time off to see some callers from Duxbury. We swapped information about channels in the bay and paths in the woods. I wound up with "Do you remember the place where Hound's Ditch crosses the railroad track at the 38 milestone, and the forgetmenots grow, and the pink orchids?" He didn't answer. I looked at him curiously, and his eyes were wet. He was remembering.